

Message Text

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SUBJECT: US/EC PRESIDENCY DIALOGUE - JANUARY 25-26
EC NINE POLITICAL DIRECTORS MEETING (MIDDLE EAST)

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1. IN ADDITION TO MATERIAL ON MIDDLE EAST SITUATION PROVIDED SEPTEL, EMBASSY IS REQUESTED TO CONVEY THE FOLLOWING ANALYSIS OF SITUATION IN LEBANON TO BRITISH PRESIDENCY.

2: THE LEBANESE CONFLICT HAS HAD POTENTIALLY FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS FOR STABILITY IN THE AREA GENERALLY AND FOR FUTURE PEACEMAKING EFFORTS IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONTEXT. IT HAS BEEN WINDING DOWN SLOWLY WITH THE FOLLOWING RESULTS SINCE THE RIYADH AND CAIRO SUMMIT AGREEMENTS IN OCTOBER.

-- THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT IS MUCH REDUCED IN MILITARY AND POLITICAL EFFECTIVENESS, AS WELL AS IN ITS ABILITY TO INTERFERE WITH FUTURE MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATING EFFORTS. ITS LEADERSHIP IS DISCREDITED IN MUCH OF THE ARAB WORLD. SYRIA, FORMERLY THE PLO'S STAUNCHEST ALLY, IS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MILITARY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFEATS OF THE PALES-

TINIANS AND IS ENCOURAGING LEADERSHIP AND POLICY CHANGES IN THE MOVEMENT.

-- THE RIYADH-CAIRO SUMMIT AGREEMENTS, LARGELY THE RESULT OF SAUDI ARABIAN LEADERSHIP AND INFLUENCE, ENGINEERED A RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA WHICH PROMISES A MORE PRAGMATIC AND UNITED ARAB APPROACH IN THE NEXT STAGE OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. THE RAPPROCHEMENT LARGELY HAS ELIMINATED INTER-ARAB FRICTIONS IN THREE KEY AREAS -- OVER THE SINAI II AGREEMENT BETWEEN EGYPT AND ISRAEL, OVER SYRIAN GOALS IN LEBANON, AND OVER THE HANDLING OF THE PLO. THE IRAQI AND LIBYAN REGIMES, OPPOSED TO SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON AND REJECTING ANY NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL, ARE INCREASINGLY ISOLATED. THE DANGERS TO PRESIDENT ASAD'S DOMESTIC POSITION FROM OPPONENTS OF HIS LEBANON POLICY HAVE BEEN DIMINISHED. WHILE THE SOVIETS ARE NO LONGER OPPOSING SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ARAB SUMMITS,

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THEIR EARLIER STRONG OBJECTIONS WILL CLOUD SOVIET-SYRIAN RELATIONS FOR SOME TIME.

-- THE POTENTIAL THREAT TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY FROM PALESTINIAN GROUPS IN LEBANON WILL PROBABLY REMAIN AT A LOW LEVEL FOR SOME TIME, ALTHOUGH ISOLATED TERRORIST INCIDENTS CANNOT BE AVOIDED. NOW THAT THE CONFLICT IS BEING CALMED DOWN, ISRAEL'S EARLIER TOLERANCE OF SYRIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION IS SHIFTING TO MUCH GREATER APPREHENSION AND CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE SYRIAN HEGEMONY IN LEBANON. THIS CONCERN IS MOST SHARPLY FOCUSED AT PRESENT ON A POSSIBLE SYRIAN PRESENCE NEAR ISRAEL'S NORTHERN BORDER. IN PAST MONTHS, SYRIA AND ISRAEL HAVE BEHAVED CAUTIOUSLY IN THE LEBANESE CONTEXT, WHICH WOULD SEEM TO AUGUR WELL FOR THE FUTURE IN THE BROADER MIDDLE EAST CONTEXT. TENSIONS OVER SOUTHERN LEBANON, HOWEVER, COULD REVERSE THIS OTHERWISE FAVORABLE TREND.

-- THE ESSENCE OF THE PROBLEM IN THE SOUTH IS THAT ISRAEL WANTS A BUFFER THERE FREE OF BOTH ARMED PALESTINIAN AND NON-LEBANESE (E.G., SYRIAN) MILITARY FORCES. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW RAPIDLY AND EFFECTIVELY SARKIS CAN CREATE A LEBANESE FORCE THAT COULD PROJECT GOAL AUTHORITY IN THIS SENSITIVE AREA.

-- NOW STRONGLY BACKED BY THE MODERATE ARAB REGIMES, AS WELL AS BY THE U.S. AND WESTERN EUROPE, PRESIDENT SARKIS SEEMS TO HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF PACIFYING THE COUNTRY AND ESTABLISHING A MODERATE, NON-CONFRONTATIONAL, AND UNITARY STATE OF MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS.

-- IRONICALLY, THE VERY MAGNITUDE OF THE LEBANESE TRAGEDY MAY IN THE END PROVE TO HAVE BEEN A CATALYST CREATING CONDITIONS ON THE ARAB SIDE CONDUCIVE TO FUTURE PROGRESS TOWARD A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. THE CONFLICT IN LEBANON SO HIGHLIGHTED THE

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CONTRADICTIONS AND DIVISIONS IN THE ARAB WORLD

THAT MODERATE ARAB GOVERNMENTS WERE FINALLY GALVANIZED TO RE-ESTABLISH THEIR COMMON FRONT, BRING THE PLO UNDER A MEASURE OF CONTROL, ISOLATE THE MILITANT ARAB STATES, AND PREPARE FOR A RENEWED EFFORT TOWARD AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT IN THE AREA. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE VIOLENCE IN LEBANON HAS REINFORCED ISRAELI DOUBTS ABOUT THE VIABILITY OF ANY PEACE SETTLEMENT AND THE POSSIBILITY OF PEACEFUL ARAB-ISRAELI COEXISTENCE.

PRESIDENT SARKIS FACES FOUR MAJOR PROBLEMS AHEAD: (1) HE MUST RE-ESTABLISH SECURITY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND EVENTUALLY DEVELOP A LEBANESE ARMED FORCE CAPABLE OF PRESERVING INTERNAL SECURITY WITHOUT OUTSIDE HELP; (2) HE MUST DEFINE THE SCOPE OF THE FUTURE PALESTINIAN ROLE AND PRESENCE, AND MAKE THESE LIMITATIONS STICK; (3) HE MUST DEVELOP A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT AMONG THE LEBANESE THEMSELVES, WHICH WILL ENCOUNTER STRONG RESISTANCE FROM SUCH POWERFUL CHRISTIAN LEADERS AS FORMER PRESIDENT CHAMOUN; AND (4) HE MUST SET IN MOTION PROGRAMS TO REBUILD THE ECONOMY AND BASIC LEBANESE INSTITUTIONS.

THE ARAB DETERRENT FORCE (ADF), FORMED AS A RESULT OF THE RIYADH AND CAIRO AGREEMENTS AND COMPOSED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY OF SYRIAN TROOPS, HAS BEEN WORKING CLOSELY WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS AND ITS TITULAR LEBANESE MILITARY COMMANDER TO ESTABLISH REASONABLE CALM IN THE COUNTRY. THE EXCEPTION IS SOUTHERN LEBANON, WHICH THE ARAB FORCE HAS NOT YET ENTERED.

CHRISTIAN RIGHTIST MILITIAS HAVE COOPERATED WITH THE ADF EVEN TO EXTENT OF PERMITTING LIMITED ARAB FORCE UNITS TO BE STATIONED IN SUCH KEY CHRISTIAN BASES AS THE PORT OF JOUNIEH. THE MAINLINE PLO/FATAH FORCES HAVE ALSO COOPERATED WITH THE ADF SO FAR. MAJOR GROUPS FROM BOTH CAMPS

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PROVIDED LISTS OF HEAVY WEAPONS IN EARLY JANUARY TO COMPLY WITH THE GOL'S ANNOUNCED DEADLINE FOR THE COLLECTION OF THOSE WEAPONS. ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL LEBANESE STATEMENTS AND THE CENSORED PRESS, THE LISTED ARMS HAVE

NOW BEEN TURNED OVER TO THE VARIOUS DESIGNATED DEPOTS UNDER ADF SUPERVISION, BUT IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THE LISTS PROVIDED REPRESENTED THE FULL INVENTORIES OF THE VARIOUS MILITIAS.

THE PLO-FATAH HAVE ALSO WITHDRAWN THE BULK OF THEIR FIGHTING MEN AND HEAVY ARMS EITHER TO SOUTH LEBANON OR INTO PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS NOT ENTERED SO FAR BY THE ADF. THE REGULAR PLA FORCES (E.G. AIN JALUT, QADDISIYA BRGDS) THAT ENTERED THE COUNTRY DURING THE CONFLICT ARE REPORTEDLY WITHDRAWING FROM LEBANON ENTIRELY. THE REJECTIONIST PALESTINIANS, INCLUDING HABBASH'S PFLP AND THE IRAQI-SPONSORED ALF, APPEAR TO HAVE BEGUN WITHDRAWING SOME OF THEIR ELEMENTS AS WELL. THE PALESTINIAN MILITARY AND POLITICAL RETREAT HAS SIGNIFICANTLY UNDERMINED THE POSITION OF THEIR LEBANESE LEFTIST ALLIES, IN PARTICULAR DRUZE LEADER KAMAL JUMBLATT.

THE BASIC STRATEGY OF SARKIS, IN TACKLING THE FOUR MAJOR PROBLEMS CITED, IS TO DEAL INITIALLY WITH THE PALESTINIAN DIMENSION OF THE CONFLICT BEFORE TURNING TO DEVELOPMENT OF WHAT HE HAS DESCRIBED AS A "NATIONAL CONSENSUS" AMONG THE LEBANESE THEMSELVES. HIS STRATEGY IS SUPPORTED BY THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY GENERALLY AND BY MUSLIM MODERATES, AS WELL AS BY THE FOUR OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS REPRESENTED AT THE RIYADH SUMMIT (EGYPT, SYRIA, SAUDI ARABIA AND KUWAIT).

PRIOR TO THE CONFLICT, THE UNINTEGRATED AND MILITANT PALESTINIAN REFUGEE COMMUNITY, REPRESENTING 15 PERCENT OF LEBANON'S POPULATION, HAD BECOME VIRTUALLY A STATE-
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WITHIN-A-STATE. THEIR GOALS WERE DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TO LEBANON'S POLICY OF AVOIDING INVOLVEMENT IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CRISIS. UNDERSTANDINGS EMERGING FROM THE RIYADH-CAIRO SUMMITS WOULD SEEM TO ALLOW THE PALESTINIANS TO SET UP BASES IN THE ARQUB REGION ("FATAHLAND") IN SOUTHEAST LEBANON. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN, HOWEVER, WHETHER THE SYRIANS AND THE CHRISTIAN RIGHTISTS, TO SAY NOTHING OF ISRAEL, WILL ACQUIESCE IN SUCH A DEVELOPMENT. SOME LEADERS (FORMER PRESIDENT CHAMOUN) ARE SEEKING A FAR MORE RESTRICTIVE ROLE FOR THE PALESTINIANS THAN FORESEEN IN THE RIYADH-CAIRO AGREEMENTS.

MEANWHILE, THE INTERNAL STRUGGLE FOR POWER TOUCHED OFF WITHIN PLO LEADERSHIP COUNCILS BY PALESTINIAN DEFEATS HAS BEEN WON, AT LEAST FOR THE PRESENT, BY THE SO-CALLED MODERATES OR PRAGMATISTS LED BY ARAFAT. IF ARAFAT'S RECENT PROTESTATIONS ARE TO BE BELIEVED, THE RESULT MAY BE TO FORECLOSE FATAH ATTACKS ON ISRAEL OR FATAH-SPONSORED TERRORIST ACTIVITIES ELSEWHERE. AT THE SAME TIME -- AT LEAST TEMPORARILY -- THE PLO-FATAH LEADERSHIP IS TO DETERMINE WHETHER A BASICALLY POLITICAL STRATEGY AND A SOFTER STANCE VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL WILL PRODUCE MORE USEFUL RESULTS FROM THE PLO PERSPECTIVE IN THE NEXT PHASE OF THE PEACEMAKING PROCESS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. IF THE LEADERSHIP DECIDES IT IS UNPRODUCTIVE, A MILITARY-TERRORIST STRATEGY, DIRECTED AGAINST MODERATE ARAB GOVERNMENTS AS WELL AS ISRAEL, MIGHT WELL BE MOUNTED.

IN TURNING TO THE TASK OF DEVELOPING A POLITICAL SOLUTION AMONG THE LEBANESE THEMSELVES, SARKIS WILL HAVE TO DEAL WITH CONFESSITIONAL, FEUDALIST, AND LEFT-RIGHT DIVISIONS SHARPENED BY THE CONFLICT. AT THE HEART OF THE LEBANESE PROBLEM ARE COMPLEX STRESSES THAT HAVE BUILT UP WITHIN THE POLITICAL/ECONOMIC/SOCIAL SYSTEM -- A SYSTEM DESIGNED TO ASSURE CHRISTIAN DOMINANCE WITH THE COOPEZATION OF THE TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM

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LEADERSHIP. BECAUSE THE CHRISTIANS HAD IN RECENT YEARS BECOME A MINORITY, YET WERE RESISTING CHANGES IN THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM, PRESSURES SWELLED FROM A COALITION OF MILITANT MUSLIMS AND SECULAR LEFTISTS WHO WERE JOINED IN THE CONFLICT BY THE PALESTINIANS. THE SYRIANS ARE LIKELY TO HELP REFORMIST-MINDED SARKIS IN SEEKING MANY OVERDUE CHANGES IN AN UNBALANCED POLITICAL/SOCIAL SYSTEM AND IN WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN THE MOST LAISSEZ-FAIRE ECONOMY IN THE WORLD.

ANY PRODUCTIVE EFFORTS TO IMPART NEW MOMENTUM TO THE MIDDLE EAST PEACEMAKING PROCESS WILL HAVE A BENEFICIAL RIPPLE EFFECT ON LEBANON. TO THE DEGREE THAT THE PALESTINIANS SEE HOPE OF A WIDER SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE, THIS WILL HAVE A CALMING EFFECT ON THE PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY IN LEBANON. IN TURN THIS QUIESCEENCE WOULD IMPROVE SARKIS'S CHANCES OF SUCCESS IN DEFINING AND RESTRICTING THE PALESTINIAN ROLE AND ISOLATING THE MILITANT REJECTIONISTS, WITH THE HELP OF THE PRINCIPAL ARAB STATES.

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